

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honored to be with you today to speak on behalf of Alabama's forest landowners regarding USDA programs and activities.

As you know, forestry is vital to the health of Alabama's economy. 23 million acres of trees blanket Alabama's landscape, second only to Georgia in having the most forested acres of any state in the continental U.S. This abundant, renewable resource fuels a multi-billion dollar forest products industry with an annual economic impact of over \$13 billion. In fact, if it weren't for the timber business in rural counties like Chambers, there would be little else to drive the economy.

With that as background, please allow me to offer some suggestions about how you as policy makers can partner with landowners to help us exercise good stewardship of Alabama's forest and to provide additional economic development opportunities for rural Alabama.

First, let me address the topic of energy independence. In Alabama, the same forest resource that supplies our forest products

industry also represents a vast, untapped source of renewable energy. Technology currently exists to convert forest residue.... the material we are currently leaving in the woods after harvesting..... to steam and then to energy. More affordable technology is needed to convert woody biomass to liquid fuels. Congress has a unique opportunity here to develop and fund programs that encourage wise stewardship of our state's forests, promote economic development in rural Alabama counties, and take a step toward reducing our nation's dependence on foreign oil.

Specifically, I ask the Committee to consider tax incentives to encourage landowners to grow and sell woody biomass and for producers to convert biomass to usable fuels. We also need continued funding for research and development that advances conversion technologies, especially those technologies that would convert woody biomass to liquid fuels.

My second issue of concern is conservation practices. Conservation practices common on Alabama forest land include reforestation, watershed protection, and wildlife management. Investments made by Alabama's landowners in these conservation

practices impact the lives of every citizen in the state through the forest products they depend on, the clean water they drink, and the wildlife they enjoy. While these benefits to society are substantial, landowners often find it difficult to invest the needed funds knowing that any returns they might hope for on those investments will be at least 20 to 25 years in the future.

With that in mind, I would ask the Committee to continue existing programs aimed at providing both technical assistance as well as cost share funds to partially offset the investments required. I recommend enhancing and expanding programs like EQUIP. This investment would provide a significant payback by providing clean water, clean air, and forest products for all Alabamians.

A third concern that I want to bring to your attention today concerns invasive species. Invasive species are having a significant impact on forest and farm operations throughout the South. Some examples of these species include privet, cogon grass, Japanese climbing fern, and, last but certainly not least, kudzu. To understand the potential impact of these invasive species, all one has to do is to drive up US Highway 431 from Opelika to my land in Chambers

County in early summer and look at all of the old fields wrapped up in kudzu. In fact, a close look often reveals an old home or barn that has been completely swallowed up by this insidious vine. They tell me that under ideal conditions kudzu can grow up to 1 foot per day and, unfortunately, our most productive lands may provide those ideal conditions.

If you consider the growing impact of kudzu and multiply that times the number of other invasive species that have been more recently introduced, you can see that we landowners are engaged in a real battle. What we need is a comprehensive invasive species program in cooperation with NRCS, Extension, and the Farm Service Agency to address significant increase and spread of uncontrolled invasive plants.

Finally, I cannot pass up this opportunity to strongly urge your continued support to eliminate the death tax. Many landowners like myself have poured their lives into managing their land. For them, their land is not an asset, it is part of who they are, it is part of their heritage...and, at their death, it is a huge part of the legacy they leave. All too often, this legacy has to be carved up and sold off in

order to pay the estate tax. I cannot understand how this accomplishes any legitimate goal of society. In fact, the death tax often has very negative environmental impacts. Consider a forest landowner who dies without any cash in the bank. When the estate tax bill comes due, his family may be forced to harvest timber without regard to ecological considerations. Further, if the timber harvests don't generate enough funds to pay the tax, the family may be forced to sell all or part of the land. This situation is especially evident near more populated areas, where land values have escalated. In these cases, the estate tax often has the practical effect of converting family farms to developments, forests to asphalt and concrete.

While tax policy is not necessarily within the purview of this Committee, this does have a direct bearing on the future of family farms and forests. I ask each of you to work with your colleagues in Congress to permanently eliminate the death tax and help us secure the future of family farms and forests in Alabama.

It has been my great honor to speak with you today and to share some of my thoughts and ideas. I hope I have provided you with a sense of some of the things that are important to landowners in

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rural Alabama and I know that each of you are working to ensure that our nation's private landowners can continue to provide our society with clean water and clean air, as well as the forest products we have come to depend on.